Cooking for a Cutie (Or: Someone Actually Helps Will Graham)

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Cooking for a Cutie (Or: Someone Actually Helps Will Graham)

by multifandom_fanfic_writer

Summary

Beverly nominates Will for Queer Eye.

Or: A fic about Will Graham getting nice things.

Notes

I wanted to write happy things. And a crossover with Queer Eye. Then it turned out longer than I expected.

I hope you like it <3

See the end of the work for more notes

Time for a change

"So…" Tan begins. "Who's our lucky victim this week?"

"His name is Will Graham," Jonathan says from the passenger seat, "and he's, let's see, thirty-nine years old and lives in Wolf Trap, Virginia."

"That's in the middle of nowhere!" Karamo remarks from behind the wheel, a gleam of interest in his eyes. "He must be a bit of a recluse."

"He is," Jonathan says, pursing his lips. "His hobbies are fishing, hiking… oh, he has seven dogs!"

"Seven?!" The other Fab Five exclaim simultaneously, expressions ranging from affronted shock (Tan) to surprised excitement (Antoni).

"*Seven*," Jonathan confirms, "and not only that…" he gasps as he turns the page and lays eyes upon Will's picture. "He's also a *total hottie*!"

Bobby shakes his head as the others agree, Jonathan showing Will's picture to them like a trophy. "Who signed him up?" Bobby asks.

"A woman named Beverly Katz, a colleague and friend of his," Jonathan tells the others happily. "Apparently, he's having a big presentation on his newest paper about… psychological motives of family-based serial killers? That's so creepy!" he shudders.

"Does he work for the police?" Tan asks. "He does. The FBI, actually," Karamo chips in. "Technically he's a professor of criminal profiling, but he helped catch the Minnesota Shrike, and worked on the Lost Boys case as well."

"I heard about the Shrike," Tan says, impressed, while Jonathan simultaneously exclaims, "A detective! Like on TV. Mysterious."

"Well," Bobby says as he reads over Jonathan's shoulder, "apparently he's really bad with people, crowds, and the spotlight. That presentation is going to have all three."

"Working hard to keep all of us safe, but doesn't want any gratitude," Karamo muses.

"Well then," Antoni says cheerfully, "that sounds like it's time for the Fab Five to go to work!"

The whole car cheers as it turns left on the road to Wolf Trap.

Will has just come home from his weekly not-therapy session when he hears a car pull up. Frowning, Will shakes the last lingering thoughts about Hannibal as he saved that man in the ambulance a few days ago – the concentrated pull of his brows, confident and efficient

movements, his elegant fingers working delicately – and peers out of his window. He doesn't recognize the truck that pulls up.

The dogs start barking excitedly. Will walks out to the porch with narrowed eyes as the car comes to a halt and five men exit the vehicle.

The feeling of dread and suspicion is quickly replaced by confusion as Will studies the men. They seem to be a group of… friends? There is a chaotic but positive energy about them that implies they're quite harmless. It could be a front, but Will doesn't think so.

"Hello," Will greets the five strangers, trying not to sound too rude, "who are you?"

"You must be Will Graham!" The tall, long-haired man speaks first, eyes glittering with excitement and arms moving wildly. "My name is Jonathan, and I'm your new—" The excitable man is pulled back by his arm by his dark-skinned friend.

Jonathan reminds Will a bit of a puppy. In contrast, the other man is calm and peaceful as he smiles at him.

"Hello Will," he says, "my name is Karamo. These are Tan, Bobby and Antoni. We're the Fab Five, and you've been chosen as a participant on this season's Queer Eye!"

Will blinks. About half of the words in that sentence don't make sense to him. "Wait, what? Who?"

Jonathan falters, but Karamo is undisturbed. "Your friend Beverly signed you up, and informed us you consented to participate," he says politely.

Will blinks again. "Uh. Let me make a phone call, please. I'll be back in just a moment." Will disappears into the house, not caring that he's letting them stay outside in the crisp autumn air, making sure the dogs do not slip out even though they're barking in excitement – *are those his dogs? I want to meet them, let's go – not now, Antoni, Will clearly needs a minute* – and calls Beverly.

"Will! What's up?"

"What the hell is Queer Eye?"

Will can almost hear Beverly's grin through the line. "They've arrived! Awesome! You remember, right? I asked if you were okay with me signing you up when you told me about your paper presentation a few weeks back…"

Will frowns. In the midst of the Lost Boys case, probably. He'd been sleeping awfully those days. There's a good chance he'd consented to it without remembering. "Remind me what these guys do again?"

As Beverly launches into a short but thorough explanation, the happiness and excitement in her voice are evident. Beverly truly believes this will be good for him, Will realizes. That it will help him get his life back on track.

Beverly is literally one of the two people on this earth Will could call a friend – and the friendship between him and Alana has always been a little strained with her conflicting desires. The only other person Will would even come close to calling a friend is Hannibal, and the man is his goddamn not-psychiatrist.

Will sighs. Surely it can't hurt. He has the next week off in preparation for the paper, anyway. And the Fab Five seem like good guys.

Will has always been an excellent judge of character.

"Okay, okay," Will interrupts Beverly. "I'll do it." Beverly squeals. "Awesome! You won't regret it, Will. And if you need anything from me, you need only ask!"

"Thank you," says Will honestly, and hangs up. Stepping back outside, the Fab Five stop talking amongst each other and turn towards him.

"Uh," Will says, awkwardly. "So how exactly does this work?"

He's greeted with five blinding smiles. "Don't worry, Mr. Graham," a man who Will remembers is called Tan says, "we only went by to introduce ourselves and give you some time to prepare. Beverly said you would appreciate that. We'll be here tomorrow at eight thirty with the camera crew. Then you can show us your house!" *Camera crew*. Oh god, what had he just agreed to? Is it too late to call it off?

"And introduce us to the dogs," Antoni adds with excitement in his eyes.

"That's nice of you," Will says, touched despite himself at their thoughtfulness. He'll probably need the whole night to adjust to this idea. "It'll give me some time to tidy my place," he mutters, only to be interrupted by Bobby holding his hand up.

"Please don't," he says and Will knows he is not lying. "We'd like to know the real you, messy house and all."

Will nods, a little perplexed. Well, if it matters so much to them, sure. He's not sure what exactly there is to get to know about him, except that he's halfway towards going completely mental.

That night Will goes to sleep feeling like his life is spinning out of his control. There is a very obvious cause. For once, it's not murder.

He sleeps easy that night.

"You have absolutely *beautiful* locks!"

Jonathan's gasp is genuine as he pets Will's hair gently. Will is leaning on the counter in his bathroom, feeling too awkward to shrug Jonathan off. It would be like kicking a puppy. That's one thing Will could never do.

“Thank you, I guess,” Will says uneasily. He looks in the mirror. Jonathan is looking confident and, dare he say, fabulous. Will looks wrong next to him, like someone forgot to take the trash outside. His hair is messy and unkept, his eyes alight with a strange glow. He did shower that morning, which should count for something.

“And you have such smooth skin,” Jonathan marvels as he touches the back of his hand to Will’s cheek fleetingly. Will barely stops himself from shuddering – it’s the most non-violent skin-to-skin contact he’s had in weeks. Months. Maybe even longer.

People don’t often manage to pierce through his outer defences. Will allows it even less.

“What’s your regimen?”

“My what,” Will asks flatly.

“Your skin care routine,” Jonathan explains, flipping his long hair over his shoulder. It looks soft, and smooth, and healthy. Will is only a little jealous.

Jonathan starts opening the few cabinets and cupboards in his bathroom. There’s not much aside from a lot of painkillers and some toothpaste. Will side-eyes the cameraman standing just outside the bathroom door nervously. It’s kind of hard to ignore.

“I don’t have one,” Will says after too long of a pause. “I wash my face with water before I go to sleep and after I wake up, and that’s it, really.” Will can’t help the feeling of embarrassment rising up inside of him. He’s living like a brute. There’s probably so much hygiene or skin-care he should be doing like any other normal person, but no, he can’t even be normal like this, what will Jonathan say, never mind what someone like Dr. Lecter would say—

“That’s amazing,” Jonathan interrupts his spiralling train of thought. “Most skin care products can actually upset the pH balance in your skin, and though most people do need some extra hygiene to prevent their pores from clogging up or their skin from chafing, it looks like you don’t need it at all! I’m so *jealous*,” the man sighs drastically.

The awkward embarrassment fades, turning into a warm embarrassment instead.

Improvement.

“That’s good,” Will says shyly.

“And what about your hair and beard?” Jonathan asks.

Will simply shrugs in response.

Jonathan hums, brushing through Will’s hair once more. The man is looking at himself in the mirror, twirling his own hair around one finger, playing with Will’s hair with the other, making silly faces as he does so. It does looks kind of silly, and Will can’t help but smile.

“You do look like a low-maintenance guy,” the barber says seriously, “so I’ll keep that in mind for your haircut. The outdoor and rough vibe suits you, by the way. You’re so

handsome!"

Will feels a little colour rise to his cheeks. "It's my life," he shrugs, ignoring the second part.

Jonathan steps away from Will, fluttering around the bathroom like he has enough energy for a whole army. "And it's so lovely, such a beautiful house in such a beautiful place, silent and remote, and so *wild*." The purr in his voice is playful and makes the last word far more dirty than it should be. Will clears his throat, not knowing how to react.

"I *will* enlighten you by introducing you to a beard oil, darling," Jonathan says as he bends down to pet one of the dogs that has wandered in, nosing around curiously. "It'll cost you less than a minute to rub it into your beautiful beard every morning, and your beard will turn so soft and smooth and smell absolutely *amazing*, it'll make you even more handsome than you already are!"

Max noses at Jonathan's leg. "Oh," the man says, "and let's not forget you, of course you're a good dog, of course you are!"

Jonathan is successfully distracted by Max. Will's grateful; it means the other man can't see the blush rising on his cheeks.

"Do you keep all your clothes here?"

Tan is standing in front of the single dresser next to Will's bed. His face is neutral, his tone friendly. Will still feels bad. The cameraman next to him makes the feeling even worse.

"Yeah," he says.

Tan hums. "I can see your clothes are very organized," he says as he starts opening drawers, "and you take good care of them."

"I do," Will says.

"You do not have a lot of clothes for a man your age," Tan says neutrally. "Is this out of choice or out of necessity?"

Will grimaces, catching on quickly. "Money is not the problem," he says quickly. Truthfully, living as sparsely as he does on his salary, money is the least of his problems.

"I'm glad," Tan says, and moves on to another subject. Will feels his stomach unclench. "I notice two things – you have a lot of night shirts?" It's more of a question than an observation.

"I sweat a lot," Will says, unwilling to elaborate, side-eying the camera.

Tan simply nods and makes a soft noise. "That's good to know," he says. "Second, I see flannel. A *lot* of it."

Will finds himself chuckling, rubbing the back of his head. "I like flannel," he says simply.

“You’re so handsome when you smile,” Tan says unabashedly. An honest compliment, not a come-on. Will feels himself frown in reflex. “No,” Tan insists, “you are. You have a lovely smile.”

Will swallows. His throat feels strangely thick. “Thank you,” he manages at length.

Tan has obviously decided to have mercy on him, busying himself with laying out all the different kinds of flannel he can find on Will’s bed. “Look at that,” he’s saying to the camera, drawing its attention as Will composes himself, “a good eye for colours and combinations, though the quality is,” Tan frowns as he inspects the clothes, “subpar.”

Will flinches without meaning to, and Tan turns to him. “What I mean with that,” the fashion expert says, “is that they seem to be of decent quality, but not the right size. The shirts are a little too large, a little shabby. There’s no definition, no fit. Are you used to hiding yourself away behind baggy clothes?”

Will blinks. It’s usually him doing the profiling. It’s a weird feeling.

“Yes,” he says.

“Well, stop!” Tan exclaims, stepping closer. “You are beautiful and wonderful and you deserve to show that off – and get appreciated for it!”

There are some facts that are important to consider, right now.

In Will’s daily life, kind words or encouragement are a rare event. Once in a blue moon. Something to be savoured.

Alana’s concern, the occasional *you’re looking well, today* with the underlying implication of *unlike yesterday*. Jack, after closing a case, *good job catching this one*, as if it would erase his stressed and harsh words from only hours before, or the fact that there will always be the next and the next and the next.

These facts might explain why Will is currently unable to speak.

Instead of replying, Will just looks at Tan, who is laying more and more clothes on the bed with a thoughtful expression on his face. Will watches it like it is happening to someone else; a stranger in his own body, in his own house.

Buster noses against his leg, licking his limp hand. Will blinks. Exhales.

It’s not a moment too soon. “You really rock the outdoorsman look,” Tan says as he finally seems to be done with Will’s wardrobe. “We’ll build on that for sure. I’m also thinking of getting you something nice.” At Will’s expression, Tan laughs. “Don’t worry,” he says, pinching the air with his fingers, “just one little thing. For when you want to show off to someone.”

The expression on his face turns mischievous. “Don’t you want to show off to someone?” Tan asks slyly.

“Maybe,” Will says, thinking about Alana with her soft hands and sparkling smile, a curious light in her eyes – then suddenly he’s thinking about Hannibal’s confidence, hands inside of Devon Silvestri’s victim, working steadily, a pillar of strength in the FBI’s sea of chaos.

“Maybe,” Will repeats to himself, softly.

Before he knows it, Will’s whisked away once more. This time, it’s to his study, and Bobby is the one pulling him along.

Will tries to ignore the way the camera is following them. He’s getting better at it.

He knows Bobby is the one with the interior design. The profiler readies himself for the inevitable disapproving questions – *bed in the living room? Dog beds next to it?* Will bites his lip.

“What made you decide to design this house the way it is?” Bobby asks casually as he gestures around his study, wide arms including the rest of the house in his question.

Will looks away. He doesn’t know if that question is better or worse. “This is the way I was when I brought it,” he says carefully, bracing himself for Bobby’s reaction. Somehow, within less than an hour of meeting these guys, Will has already started to yearn for their approval.

Pathetic.

Bobby clearly wants to gasp in shocked affront. To his credit, he keeps it mostly off his face. If only it could escape Will’s empathy.

Still, he is reminded of Hannibal in his best psychiatrist-pose when Bobby asks politely, “was it all like this? Or were there elements you added yourself?”

Will blinks. “Some,” he admits. “I added the desk,” he says as he waves to his fly-fishing equipment, “and all the stuff for the dogs, obviously.”

“Your dogs are *amazing*,” Bobby gushes. “I want to steal all of them!”

“Careful,” Will says, “I *am* licenced to carry a gun.”

Bobby laughs. Will feels pleased.

The designer is a little distracted by petting Winston, who has been circling around Will and now Bobby himself, but looks like he’s in deep thought. “The dogs’ beds and supplies are high-quality and well-chosen,” Bobby says after a while. “It seems like you put a lot more money and energy into them than you did into yourself.”

“Maybe,” Will says.

Without realizing it, Will has pulled his arms around himself, holding on tightly. He’s made aware of this as Bobby steps closer, putting one hand on his arm.

“Your house is to you as your body is to your mind,” Bobby says gently. “It is the shell which houses the truly important thing – yourself. The state of your home directly influences your mental and physical health. It’s important to take good care of it, that it feels right to you, like your mind belonging in your body.”

Will swallows. Some days, he doesn’t even feel like his mind belongs to his body. The feeling of the house truly feeling like *his* is an alien thought.

“Don’t worry,” Bobby reassures him. “We’re here to help you with that. Tan mentioned you sweat a lot?”

Will nodded, not meeting Bobby’s eyes. “Yeah.”

“We’ll find sheets and a bed that can be rinsed easily and don’t absorb the odour,” Bobby says as if it’s the most normal thing in the world. “And, then there is another, even more important thing.” He looks at Will as if waiting for him to finish the sentence.

“Eh,” Will says.

“You have an *entire unused second floor*!” Bobby exclaims loudly.

“*What?!*”

Bobby’s shout resonates around the house, and soon, the other Fab 5 come calling. Bobby drags Will upstairs, the others buzzing around him in exited movement.

Will allows it. He’s smiling as he does so. The positive energy is rubbing off on him – his empathy functioning at it’s best.

The mirrors in your mind can be used to reflect the best of yourself, not the worst of someone else.

Will doesn’t think Hannibal intended for his words to be applied in this situation, but what the hell.

Why not.

After the Fab 5 have sufficiently gawked at the unused space of his upper floor, Will finds himself outside, sitting at his front porch. The air is refreshing, Winston dozing at his feet. The camera, just out of sight, is easy to ignore.

Karamo brings him a cup of tea.

“They can be a bit overwhelming sometimes,” the man says fondly as Will clasps his cup in both hands and shoots him a grateful smile.

“A bit,” Will says, “but it’s not a bad thing. They are very happy, and that makes me happy as well,” he admits honestly.

It's true. Will's feeling lighter than he has in months.

"Beverly told us a bit about your empathy," Karamo prompts.

Will sips the tea, not wincing when it burns his tongue just a little. He looks out over his property, the trees moving gently in the spring breeze.

"It's a useful tool," Will says. "Helps me see into the mind of killers."

"Just killers?" Karamo asks.

Will smiles, glad to be asked instead of telling, for once. "Everyone," he says. "The lady at the supermarket, this weeks' latest killer, my boss, you guys…"

Karamo cocks his head. "It must be hard maintaining your own boundaries when you constantly look at things through the others' point of view."

Will closes his eyes. Of course. Another psychiatrist.

Somehow, it doesn't install as much dread in him as usual. Maybe because Karamo seems more like a successful television lifetime coach than a true shrink. Or maybe his not-sessions with Hannibal have shown him not all shrinks are bad.

"I don't often say no," Will says softly.

Karamo leans closer. "Maybe you should," he says, not unkindly. "I imagine people are apt at pushing your boundaries when they need to, especially when they know about your empathy."

Will's fingers twitch. Like Jack.

"Who are you thinking of?" Karamo asks, astute.

Will sighs. "My boss," he says, hoping to hell Jack won't see this. On the other hand, maybe it'll be good for him to see what Will really thinks. Will has never been able to say these things to Jack's face, empathizing too much with the man whenever he's in the room with him. He knows Jack's not a bad guy, he's just… driven. Forceful.

"He knows I'm the best, so he pushes me to do my best. We save lives." The words feel rehearsed, even to his own ears.

Karamo does not move. "It's still your boundaries that are being pushed. You deserve to have your limits, and for those limits to be respected. It's a good thing to say no, sometimes," he says, sounding a little bit like Alana in that moment.

Will chuckles wryly. "There are lives at stake," he says remotely.

"*Your* life is at stake as well," Karamo says.

Will doesn't reply, sipping his tea. If he drinks enough, maybe it'll dislodge the lump in his throat.

Karamo sips his tea as well, peaceful, not pushing. Will is grateful. It takes a moment before Karamo reaches out, squeezing Will's bare lower arm with his hand gently. The contact burns, sending his whole body alight.

Will is mortified to feel tears starting to form in his eyes.

"It's okay," Karamo says softly. Will cannot help but meet the other man's gaze, and is startled by the earnest care and gentleness he sees. "You are a man who constantly sacrifices himself for others. How important those lives that you save are. From what I hear, you don't get told often enough how important *your* life is."

Will blinks, and blinks, and blinks. The hand stays on his arm, steady and warm.

Winston nudges Will's knee, whining softly. Will starts petting him as a reflex. It's calming.

A full minute passes before Karamo retreats. Winston takes this as permission to cuddle up to Will even closer.

Karamo smiles happily at the dog. "Your dogs love you a lot," he observes.

"And I them," and Will's grateful his words are steady.

Karamo's smile turns mischievous. "Are there any other people in your life like that – any lovers? Partners, of any kind?"

Will keeps his gaze on Winston. "Not really," he confesses. "I'm not the best with relationships. Had some flings, back in the day, but it's difficult with my empathy."

"Boys, girls, or both?" Karamo asks. There is only genuine curiosity in his eyes.

Again, Will thinks, *why not*, and shrugs. "Both," he says, "though mostly girls. None lasted more than a few months."

Karamo hummed. "You see too much, too soon," he states. "Most people aren't ready for others to see them so clearly."

Will nods. He doesn't think there's more left to say.

But Karamo is not done with him. "Is there anyone you like right now?"

Will bites his lip. "Yeah. I think so," he says, thinking of Alana.

Karamo raises an eyebrow. "You think so?"

"Sometimes, I'm not sure if I like her, or if she likes me so much that what I feel is an echo of that desire," he confesses. It's the first time he's said that aloud.

It’s strangely freeing.

Karamo is silent for a moment. “Let me ask you this,” he says eventually, “when you think about how you like her, or fantasize about kissing her,” Will looks away shyly, “when does this happen? When you are in her presence, or outside of it?”

Will thinks it over. “Mostly within her presence,” he realizes. “Though sometimes also outside of it.”

Karamo hums. “And when you think about the two of you, do you think of it from her perspective, or from your own?”

Will is silent.

Karamo gives him a moment and does not draw any conclusions, nor ask anything more.

If only I’d met Karamo when I was sixteen, Will thinks, *maybe then I wouldn’t have been so fucked up.*

“Is there anyone else?” Karamo asks, digging.

Will shakes his head. His eyes flicker to the camera, hovering unobtrusively on the edge of their conversation.

Karamo picks up on it and turns to the camera man, flicking his hand. “Just a minute,” he says, and the cameraman leaves without question. When Will raises an eyebrow, Karamo shrugs. “Sometimes, these conversations are a little too private for the camera. They understand.”

Will makes a noise, but Karamo is not done. “Now, tell me,” he demands gently, and Will cannot help but give in.

“It’s not someone I should like,” Will admits. “I don’t think people would approve of me and him.”

“Why not?” Karamo asks.

“We have a working relationship,” Will says, keeping it vague. “And he’s… different than me. Sophisticated. Elegant. Better. We wouldn’t fit.”

“Being different doesn’t have to be a bad thing,” Karamo says. “If you don’t mind, and he doesn’t mind, then what’s stopping you?”

Will’s eyes flicker to Karamo’s face, searching, before returning to his shoes. “I don’t think he likes me, anyway,” Will says.

Karamo puts his hand on Will’s shoulder. It’s comforting. “Let him decide that,” he says, and Will wants to believe him.

“Do you cook a lot?”

Will shakes his head. “Not really. I would lie and say I don’t have the time,” he says with a smile, and is pleased when Antoni laughs, “but I just don’t have the energy… or really know how.”

Antoni nods. “That’s okay. A lot of people don’t know much about cooking, but it really doesn’t have to be difficult.” Will snorts, thinking about Hannibal’s elaborate meals – *not difficult?*

Meanwhile, the brunette is opening cupboards and drawers in the kitchen, pulling out all kinds of different equipment. The camera follows him dutifully.

“Your kitchen is reasonably clean,” Antoni compliments him, “which is actually a big compliment for a single guy – don’t laugh, it’s true!”

Will stifles his laughter and Antoni grins at him. “And,” the chef says, “what are these for?” He pulls out the equipment Will uses for his dogs.

“I make my own dog food,” Will explains happily. “The shit they sell at the stores is awful, and since I have so many, it’s cheaper as well.”

Antoni narrows his eyes. “You put more effort into feeding your dogs than feeding yourself,” he says. It’s not judgemental. Will still feels bad. Little things like this remind him how abnormal he really is.

“Maybe,” he says.

“What do you usually eat?” Antoni asks.

Will shrugs. “Microwavable meals,” he says, “fish, sometimes, whenever I catch some.”

“That’s awesome!” Antoni exclaims, clapping his hands. “I can definitely do something with that! Teach you a few dishes that go wonderfully with fish, and when you’ve caught it yourself it’s always better!”

Will smiles, the earnestness catching. “And it’s not all bad,” Will says. “I do cook some basic meals for myself, then and again. And sometimes I even get multi-course meals forced upon me,” he adds self-deprecatingly.

Antoni claps him on the shoulder, friendly. “That’s what friends are for! Who is it? So that I know who to call when I need a hero,” he jokes.

Will chuckles. “His name is Hannibal Lecter,” he says, stomach fluttering nervously. How does his explain their relationship without using the words *off-the-books shrink who sometimes pressures me into letting him cook for me*? “He’s a colleague,” is what Will ends up with. “He’s a psychiatrist by profession, but could’ve been a chef if he wanted, for sure.”

Antoni gasps. “Wait. Hannibal Lecter? I know that name! I’ve never met him, but I’ve heard his dinner parties are legendary,” he says, pulling out his phone and typing something

quickly.

“Uh,” Will says, “I guess. I’ve never been to one,” he admits.

Antoni finds what he is looking for, and his eyebrows fly up to his face. “*Will*,” he exclaims drastically, “you forget to mention he’s *hot*!”

Will hides his face in his hands.

At that moment, Jonathan bounces into the kitchen, curiosity clear on his face. Bobby trails behind him, drawn by the commotion. “Did I hear someone say hot?” Jonathan asks.

“Look,” Antoni says, and the three friends look at Antoni’s phone, camera moving in behind them to catch a glimpse. “This is Hannibal Lecter, psychiatrist, socialite, chef, handsome, and most of all, he’s *single*. Or at least, that’s what Wikipedia claims. Oh, there’s even a rumours section!”

“He’s a bit old for me,” Bobby says, “and not really my type – but I can’t deny his charm.”

“Oh,” Jonathan says dreamily, “I don’t mind *at all*. He can be my daddy all he wants,” to which Bobby slaps Jonathan playfully, Jonathan battering his eyes obnoxiously at his friends.

Will is trying his hardest to sink through the floorboard.

Antoni hums, but he’s smiling widely. “I will say that I’m happily married,” he adds in his own two cents, “but a guy like that *and* he can cook? You’re lucky I’m not single,” he warns Will playfully.

“Wait a minute,” Jonathan says, eyes locking in on Will. “How does he know our darling Will again? Do I need to step in to defend his honour? I’m always ready for a sword fight.”

“Will here eats dinner with Dr. Lecter every so often,” Antoni tells his friends gleefully, “just the two of them.”

“It’s not like that,” Will groans, though he can’t deny the feeling of heat in his chest at the framing. Surely Hannibal doesn’t think of him like that. Right?

“*Sure* it isn’t,” Jonathan says, before being dragged out of the kitchen by Bobby, protesting loudly all the while.

Will sputters and busies himself with petting Winston.

“So,” Karamo says to his friends as they leave Will’s house that afternoon, “what do we know about Will Graham.”

“He cares a lot more about his dogs than about himself,” Bobby says.

“About anyone else, not just his dogs,” Karamo says. “I really think he has difficulty guarding his boundaries, especially from his boss. I don’t think he has a lot of positive energy

in his life – given his work is catching killers, this is less of a surprise than it should be."

"He's used to hiding himself away," Tan adds. "Both literally and metaphorically. Which I don't understand, because he's so *handsome*!"

"*Very* handsome," Jonathan agrees. "And sweet, as well! He shouldn't need to hide it."

"And," Antoni says with a smirk, "I think our dear Will has a crush." At Karamo's questions look, he says, "that Hannibal guy?"

"Is he a colleague?" Karamo asks neutrally, ignoring Jonathan swooning in the background.

"I think so, yeah," Antoni says. Karamo hums.

"Do we know enough to get to work?" Karamo asks his fellow Fab 5, aware of the camera's rolling.

"We do," Tan says, "though I think it's also time to call in some assistance."

An ode to joy

Chapter Summary

The Fab Five aren't done yet.

Chapter Notes

I'm glad you all like this story so much :D Have more serotonin!

“Not that one,” Will says as Bobby points to a plush couch. He swallows as Bobby waits for him to explain himself, as he has done so with every *yes, no* or *maybe* Will has given him during this hour-long shopping trip.

They’ve already picked out a new mattress, the colour palette for the second-floor bathroom, and new kitchen appliances – during which Will might have taken Hannibal’s tastes into account once or twice. Or more.

“The colour looks too much like blood,” Will admits softly, eyes on the fancy crimson couch. It would swallow him, just like quicksand. He would sit in it and fall backwards, further and further, until nothing would be left of him. He would sink lower and lower, through the dark and damp earth, until nothing would be around him except cool, dark silence.

Will blinks. He becomes aware he’s been staring at the couch for an uncomfortably long time. His eyes flicker towards Bobby in apology, not quite managing to get to the man’s actual eyes.

None of the Fab Five have commented on his aversion to eye contract, not even once. He’s more grateful for that then they know.

Bobby hums. He has taken the comment in stride and mulled it over, and has been waiting patiently for Will to come back to himself.

“You don’t want any reminders of your work in your home,” Bobby deduces, and oh. That. Will nods. “That’s a good thing. Separating your work and your private life.”

“I think it won’t work with the dogs, anyway,” Will adds. It would be ruined within a day.

“Indeed,” Bobby says, nodding. “What about this one?”

It's a chair this time, a little like a loveseat. It's a tasteful tawny, calming and rustic, and when Will runs his hand over the seat it feels smooth. Easy to clean.

"I like it," Will says. Bobby smiles.

"I've noticed you tend to pick out dark, calming things. A lot of wood, barely any patterns. You obviously like the rustic décor, and that's great, we'll totally work with that. However," Bobby says as he steps closer, leaning forward, "I would also encourage you to choose a few brighter pieces. Maybe a little art. It will give the space a more carefree and happy feeling and I think you might need that positivity."

Will looks at him. This time, he manages to meet his eyes. Bobby does know what he's talking about.

"Think it over," Bobby says as his eyes catch on something else, "while you look at this desk – don't you think this is *perfect* for your fly-fishing equipment?"

As Will wanders over, something nags at him. There is a feeling in his chest, strange and alien, a fluttery kind of lightness that does not bring to mind an immediate emotion. It's not the peace of his stream, nor the satisfaction of solving a case, nor the stab of hunger he feels whenever the true Hannibal peeks out from behind the cracks of the mask.

As Will and Bobby start discussing his fly-fishing, the coin drops.

It's *joy*.

Will is actually, genuinely enjoying himself.

Huh.

"Say, Will," Karamo says as he and Will sit down for breakfast at Will's hotel, his home for the week. By now, Will is almost able to pretend the camera isn't there.

Will is once again thankful that he hasn't got any lectures in preparation for the presentation of his paper; he's not sure he could've handled the extra pressure.

"Yeah?"

"You told us you've never actually adopted any dogs, just taken in strays."

"That's right," Will says, chewing listlessly at his croissant, looking at his plate. The Fab Five had been adamant on him eating three meals a day. They were almost as bad as Hannibal.

"The woods around my house attract a lot of strays. Either people dump them there, or they eventually make their way out of the city on their own."

"Which means you've never visited the local dog shelter?"

Will shrugs. “My neighbour takes care of the dogs whenever I’m away longer than a day, which isn’t often.” An understatement. Two, maybe three times since he moved to Wolf Trap is more accurate. Though now that he’s thrown his lot in with Jack…

“That’s something we’ll have to remedy,” Karamo says.

Will frowns, though his shoulders stay relaxed. “We’re going to the dog shelter?”

“Even better,” Karamo says, slowly becoming more enthusiastic, “we’re going to the dog shelter as *volunteers!*”

Will blinks, corner of his mouth twitching upwards. “Really?”

“Really,” Karamo says. “I think it’s good for you to try something new, to have a place outside of work that is not your home but also does not deal with murder.” Will snorts. “*Adorable Paws Shelter* is a no-kill shelter that tries to take good care of their animals, but for that they need volunteers. If you like it, you might consider helping them out, even if only for one day a week.”

Will bites his lip. He doesn’t like other people, but he does like dogs. *No half-assing this, Graham,* he tells himself sternly.

And so Will and Karamo make their way to the *Adorable Paws Shelter*. It’s only a thirty-minute drive from his home, or so Karamo tells him in the car.

For once, there is no camera.

Scheduling conflict, Karamo says, but the glint in his eye tells Will otherwise.

Halfway through the journey, Karamo changes his casual questions into something more probing. “Have you ever had any struggles concerning your sexuality?”

Will looks out of the window. “Not really,” he says. “I see the person and their mind before I see their body. Not that I can’t appreciate a body as well. It’s just less relevant.”

Karamo makes an interested noise. “You told me you’ve never had a real relationship.”

Will chuckles wryly, forcing himself to shrug. “People don’t really react well when you tell them their inner workings on a first date,” he says, trying not too sound too bitter, “or when you see through their lies and self-embellishments with ease, and are too tired and too rude to pretend otherwise.”

Karamo laughs, not unkindly. “Probably true. But I also think there are people out there who appreciate your ability to understand them. Who might be looking for it, even.”

Will’s eyes flicker to Karamo, hesitating, before returning to his hands. “That’s often only the case with people who can’t find that understanding in others. I think expanding my dating pool to include serial killers isn’t a move my boss would approve, so I’ve kind of given up hope,” he says half-jokingly before he can stop himself.

Karamo is silent for a moment, searching for words. Will can't blame him. He'd think himself crazy, as well.

"It is okay to want to be loved, Will."

Will swallows thickly. "What if I can't ever find somebody who'll accept…" *the nightmares, the sweating, seeing murder everywhere he goes – his own hand replacing a stranger's, plunging the knife into* – "me," he manages to choke out, cutting himself off before he can say too much.

Karamo lays a hand on his shoulder, eyes still on the road. Will shudders and does not shrug him off.

"Everyone has the fear that they won't find somebody that loves them for who they are," Karamo says. "It is natural. Normal. It is also unfounded. You are a kind, hard-working and loving person, and you will make someone very happy one day."

Will closes his eyes.

Karamo lets the silence hang for a minute, then two, then three, until Will opens his eyes and has finished collectingd himself.

"You also told me about your possible crush – or should I say *crushes*."

Will bites his lip. His stomach flutters.

"Would you do something for me?" Karamo asks gently, coaxing. "Can you picture yourself in five years, how your life would look like, ideally. Just in broad lines; don't concern yourself with the details."

Will takes a deep breath. "Sure," he says, leaning back in his seat. "Why not." Might as well give it a shot.

He thinks of his house, a safe haven in the woods, now truly a home. His dogs, an irrelevant number of them, as long as they're more than he can count on one hand. Maybe he'd even help regularly at the shelter, every other weekend, going fishing the other weekends.

"Think of your home, of your job, of your hobbies," Karamo continues. Will thinks of his teaching, of profiling, but also his sanity. Holding his own against Jack, catching the bad guys – *in one way or another,* something inside of him whispers. Making his own food, for the dogs, maybe even for someone else.

"Now try to picture her in your life," Karamo suggests. Will hesitates, but obeys.

Alana likes dogs as well, would encourage him to help at the shelter. She'd support him whenever he'd say no to Jack. They'd cook together – not well, but happily, Alana smiling softly at him over the counter. She'd kiss him, tender and sweet, as if he would break under a harsh touch. Will would want more, would press back with desperate lips and needy hands, but that wouldn't be her thing. Alana would want to make love. Will would just want to fuck.

She'd ask him about his day, ask him about his thoughts. The questions would be honest and caring, but the curious light in her eyes would catch the light. She'd take him to meet her parents, and he'd be nervous. He'd be rude. She would have a disapproving tilt to her mouth the whole ride home. Alana would talk to him afterwards, explain how she would like to act him next time, what kind of things he could do to make himself better.

She'd try to fix him. He would withdraw, become snappish. Alana wouldn't understand, *I'm only trying to help you*, but Will wouldn't want her help. They would fight more often. His eyes would stray to their kitchen knives, and he'd hate himself. He'd start drinking again – often.

No.

Will doesn't want someone who wants to fix him. He wants someone who loves him as he is, broken edges and dark corners and all.

"It looks like you've realized something," Karamo says, breaking Will out of his inner reflection. He's not sure how much time has passed.

"I have," Will says, voice rough. He's not sure what he looked like when he was so far away, but he's glad he couldn't see himself.

The smile is audible in Karamo's next words. "That's good," he says. "Now try to picture him in your life."

Will swallows, resets his mental model. House that's a home, managing his job, working with the dogs, fishing.

Hannibal would not understand his fascination with the mutts. He would take it in stride, unfazed, because Will can't imagine the man ever doing otherwise. But he wouldn't join him. Will would be wrestling with the dogs, Hannibal would be making dinner. Hannibal would want Will to go with him to the opera, socializing with Baltimore's upper crust, showing him off at dinner parties. Will would prefer to go fishing.

Hannibal would delight in his confrontational behaviour at the opera, hiding his smile behind his flawless mask whenever Will would offend one of his acquaintances (never friends). He'd go fishing with him, just to see Will in his natural habitat, to see him in the stream Will has mentioned often. It is surprisingly easy to picture Hannibal in fishing gear; Will has done it before.

Hannibal would understand Will's need for space, for privacy. He wouldn't like his dogs, but bring them home-made treats anyway. Will would go to his dinner parties, smile and look pretty with a different kind of mask on, wielding his empathy like a knife. They'd share looks of amusement whenever a guest would make a fool of themselves, two puppet masters watching their audience dance.

Hannibal would not only take his darkness in stride, he'd *delight* in it. Will is no fool. Their *conversations* so far had made that pretty clear. Hannibal wouldn't see their not-therapy as a

problem. The whole thing is pretty shady anyway, with Jack making use of Hannibal's insights.

(For the first time, Will wonders what exactly Hannibal is telling Jack.)

Hannibal… Hannibal would delight in their illicit affair. He'd never let Will do more than sous-chef or bring the fish, but would indulge him with grandiose meals whenever he got the chance. Afterwards, Hannibal would take his hand and pull him close. He'd kiss him without restraint, without hesitation, arms tightening around Will until he wouldn't be able to escape. Wouldn't want to. He'd be so strong, so steady, so *safe*. Will would growl and surge upwards and climb Hannibal like a tree, and Hannibal would be able to handle it, easily, would respond with just as much ferociousness, the monster inside the man—

Will stops himself before it gets to far. Heat is starting to pool in his gut, which is completely inappropriate seeing as he's in the car with his new friend slash life coach.

"Uhm," Will starts, then falls silent.

Karamo smirks. "Another realization?"

Will nods shyly, looking at Karamo's shoulder before averting his gaze. He clears his throat twice. "A good one, this time. I think."

"I'm glad," Karamo says.

The rest of the ride is silent as Will ponders.

The animal shelter turns out to be amazing. They have a lot of dogs and cats, but also a few other animals; birds, hamsters, bunnies, even a snake. The woman at the front is called Kala, sweet and gentle with a spine of steel. There is one other volunteer at work that day, an older man called Wolfgang. He has a grandfatherly manner about him that tells of his retirement happily spend surrounded by animals.

Will can both sympathize and empathise. He passes the day meeting dozens of animals, feeding and petting and caring for them, his experience training his own pack coming in handy.

When Kara asks him, honest and hopeful and just a little unsure, if he'll come back next week, Will says yes before he can stop himself.

"You look so *handsome*! I've truly outdone myself," Jonathan says as he wipes away an imaginary tear.

Will arches an eyebrow at him. His jaw feels cold, bare against the fresh air in the local barber's shop as it hasn't been in ages. Jonathan had to convince him to let him shave the beard off, eventually managing the admirable feat by pointing out it would grow back within the month, anyway.

Will has already picked out a bottle of beard oil together with Jonathan earlier that afternoon. He's brought three. *No half-assing this, Graham,* he'd told himself, is still telling himself.

Maybe that's why Will gives Jonathan free reign on his facial hair.

"Are you ready, Will?" Jonathan says, one hand on each of his shoulders, beaming.

"As ready as I'll ever be."

Jonathan turns his chair around, and Will blinks at himself in the mirror.

He looks good.

It's still him. Will chastises himself from expecting Jonathan to turn him into a completely different person; that is not what the Fab Five does, as they have told him repeatedly. The haircut is not drastically different from his usual hairdo, but at the same time, it's a complete overhaul.

Instead of unruly, his curls now fall gracefully, framing his face instead of obscuring it. The curls are still not brushed and a little messy, but it looks on purpose instead of lazy (or crazy). One strand is left purposefully a little longer, curling prettily over his forehead. All in all, his hair is a little shorter, the cut more even, and it makes so much difference Will strongly believes Jonathan is at least half-fey.

The lack of beard is what really finishes the look.

It opens up his face, making him seem younger. Instead of childish, the slight five-o-clock shadow on the edges of his jaw makes him look handsome. He seems more approachable, a stern teacher instead of a crazed maniac.

Will blinks. It occurs to him Jonathan is talking.

"…know how you're not big on maintenance, so the upside of this look is that you can literally step out of bed, run a hand through your hair and call it a day. Except for the beard oil, of course," Jonathan is saying, waggling a finger.

"Now, I also have a special treat hidden in this haircut," the barber continues slyly as he grabs a bottle from a nearby shelf. "And yes, you'll be taking this one home," indicating the bottle he'd just grabbed.

A little steam of gel comes out from the bottle, which Jonathan rubs over both his hands. "You only need a little, distribute it like this," he says, "and then you just—"

Jonathan holds his hands in front of Will's face and runs both his hands through Will's hair at the same time, combing it backwards and covering as much as his hair as he can in one stroke. Surprisingly (or not) the product works perfectly, hair staying combed backwards without it flattening too much.

"Oh," Will says, gazing at the sudden charming socialite that has appeared in the mirror.

“Yes!” Jonathan exclaims. “And like that, you’re suddenly ready to go for an evening out, or on a date, or to a certain gentlemen’s *dinner party*.”

Will tries to ignore the last part, colour rising to his cheeks. “It looks really good, Jonathan. *Thank you.*”

Jonathan beams broadly, happily. “I’ve instructed Sarah here,” nodding at the local barber who has been watching them all this time, “so she can replicate it every thee months. And I mean it, Will, at least the hair, every three months! This is serious business.”

“Three months,” Will agrees, promising to himself to at least try.

Jonathan sighs, deliberately dreamy, holding a hand over his heart. “You really look wonderful, Will. I would totally date you.”

Will blinks, blush coming out in full-force. “Really?”

Jonathan nods, as if his words are gospel. “Really.” In a lower tone, not picked up by the cameras, “and I’m sure your hot chef would agree.”

Despite himself, Will can’t help but want to believe him.

Hope blossoms in his chest, unfamiliar and warm.

“He’s just so precious,” Jonathan sighs to his friends as they sit down to have a drink. The Fab Five are enjoying the sun outside of small barista café in Baltimore, not a single camera in sight. The sun shines brightly that day, and there is a pleasant breeze cooling them off as they sip on their beverages.

The five of them usually meet up in the middle of the week to discuss their newest case without someone reminding them of things like *production value* and *convertible screen time*.

“Once in a while we just get someone, and I think *damn, I’m really glad you are the one chosen for us to help*,” Karamo says. “Will is one of these people. He is such a good person, but he has so little in his life, and he’s so hard on himself.”

“Absolutely,” Tan says, leaning forward. “He’s just not used at all to feeling confident in his body *or* himself. Even though he’s super smart, super handsome, and literally catches serial killers!”

“*I know right!*” Karamo agrees, a little frustration at life’s unfairness as he throws his hands in the air.

A strong breeze passes through them at that exact moment, picking up Karamo’s notes on Will and carrying them away.

“Shit!” Karamo curses as he lunges at the piece of paper, but misses. Antoni, next to him at the border of the group, rises quickly to go after it.

Before he can do much more than stand, the paper is dexterously snatched out of the air by a long, nimble-fingered hand.

Intelligent maroon eyes scan the paper for the barest moment before the man they belong to holds it out for Antoni to take, as they crinkle in a polite smile.

“I believe this belongs to you?”

“Hannibal Lecter?” Antoni gasps before he can stop himself, not quite putting his hands over his own mouth in time.

Dressed to the nines, Hannibal’s paisley blue suit, white dress shit with crimson tie and handkerchief stand out starkly against the casually dressed passers-by. The man cocks a slim eyebrow, eyes lighting up in interest.

“You are correct,” he says, holding the piece of paper out to Antoni with one hand, a fancy grocery bag stamped with *Galore* in the other. “And who might you be?”

Antoni blinks, automatically moving to accept the piece of paper. “Thank you,” he says politely, “and sorry, I just recognized you,” Antoni starts to explain, before hesitating and falling silent.

Before Hannibal can do much more minutely tilt his head in polite curiosity, the unstoppable ball of energy that is called Jonathan springs into action.

“Oh my god,” Jonathan says excitedly, starting to rise from his seat, “*you’re* doctor Hannibal Lecter? You’re even more—”

“*Jonathan,*” Tan hisses, interrupting him and pulling him back into his seat. “Manners!”

“I’m a chef,” Antoni says, ignoring his friends, “and your culinary skills are famous around these parts.”

Hannibal smiles politely, and behind Antoni, Jonathan sighs dreamily. “I’m glad to see my reputation proceeds me,” he says, “though I have a feeling this is not the only way you might have heard of me.”

Antoni bites his lip, unsure. This time, it is Karamo who speaks up.

“We’re friends with Will Graham,” Karamo says neutrally, a curious glint in his eyes. “He’s mentioned you work together?”

Karamo is being deliberately vague, and as he mentions Will’s name, he studies Hannibal intently. The doctor’s pupils dilate, his left hand twitches, and his body leans slightly forward, feet shifting until he is fully engaged with the Fab Five instead of just passing by.

Karamo has a way with people, but Hannibal Lecter is surprisingly hard to read. He’s well-mannered, immaculately put together, confident. Above all, Hannibal Lecter looks like a man who is in control. Of his surroundings, of himself, but also of his emotions.

This is why, as the words *Will Graham* leave Karamo's lips and Hannibal cannot control his own reactions, Karamo smiles.

If whatever Hannibal feels for Will is intense enough to crack his immaculate control – even if it's only a miniscule amount – at the simple mention of his name, well…

Their profiler's chances just shot up significantly.

"Only good things, I hope," Hannibal answers, and Karamo forces himself back in the present.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Lecter," Jonathan pipes up mischievously, "but we don't kiss and tell."

Tan sighs as Antoni chuckles. Karamo keeps his eyes on Hannibal.

"We're only here for the week," he says as if Jonathan hasn't spoken, which is often the best tactic, "helping Will prepare for his presentation."

"Oh?" Hannibal says, an interested tilt to his voice. He doesn't say anything more, silently inviting them to elaborate, and Karamo thinks *you're a psychiatrist, all right*. He looks at his friends for a moment, sees how Tan is holding Jonathan back – probably a good idea – and Bobby is watching them silently.

Luckily, Antoni is there to save the day.

"By the way, I was wondering, Dr. Lecter," Antoni asks politely, still standing next to their table with their notes clasped in his hands, "do you have any recommendations for locally sourced and high-quality products in Baltimore? If you have the time, of course."

Hannibal does, and chats for a few minutes with Antoni about the local farmer's market. As that conversation comes to an end, Tan can't resist to compliment the doctor on his suit, which starts a new conversation about men's fashion Karamo tries to follow for at least a minute before the terminology become too complicated.

Jonathan is typing excitedly on his phone as he's (somewhat) discreetly checking Hannibal out ever other minute. Karamo can't blame him. The doctor's ass looks fantastic in that suit.

He strikes up small talk with Bobby just to lessen the (truthful) impression all five of them are observing Hannibal.

It's another five minutes before Hannibal discreetly checks his watch.

"Apologies," he says to Tan and Antoni, nodding to the rest of them. "I'm afraid I must take my leave. It was a pleasure meeting you."

"The same to you, doctor," Tan says as the other Fab Five echo him.

Hannibal shoots them a last automatic smile and leaves, casually making his way down the street. Passers-by part for him naturally, as if by instinct.

“He’s even more handsome than Will said!” Jonathan half-whispers excitedly as soon as Hannibal is out of earshot. Bobby elbows him, making a shushing noise.

“He’s certainly something,” Karamo agrees.

“He’s even more handsome than Will said!”

Hannibal’s ears just manage to pick up the words as he walks away, smiling. This time, the smile is genuine.

These new friends of Will are polite. Cultured. Free-minded, to say the least.

Of course, Hannibal will have to wait and see if they deserve to be around his Will. What kind of influence they might have on him.

If necessary, Hannibal can always remove them.

He hopes it will not come to that; they have excellent manners. If they are only here for the week, helping Will *prepare* – and what exactly does that mean? – for his presentation, they might even have a positive influence on the man.

Hannibal can forgive a lot if they manage to get Will in a good suit.

“I have a surprise for you,” Tan says happily as he takes Will along by the arm. The camera walks in front of them, people politely making way.

“Should I have brought my gun?” Will jokes and feels content when Tan laughs, slapping his arm in a friendly gesture.

“The only enemy defeated today will be bad tailoring.”

Will snorts. *That sounds like something Hannibal would say.*

When Tan leads him into the shopping centre and towards the second floor, where the more expensive shops are located, Will holds his breath. He’s expecting an overabundance of luxury, a shop where you’re offered tea and the tailor talks with a French accent.

The kind of place Hannibal would go.

The shop Tan leads him into is called *Hunting Ground*. The storefront is done up like a weathered-down church front. Will is torn; a part of him flinches away from it, another thinks that he’ll fit here just fine.

As they enter, Will is relieved to discover it’s not that bad.

Hunting Ground is elegant, yes, but doesn’t carry the arrogance of a shop that caters only to the rich. The shop assistant greets them with a friendly smile, introduces herself as Marilyn, and doesn’t offer them tea.

“Is the shop temporarily closed just for us?” Will grumbles to Tan out of Marilyn’s hearing range.

Tan nods, eyes scanning the shop. “Of course. We get the room we need to film, and they get good PR. It’s a win-win.”

Will sighs. It makes sense, but it leaves him feeling terribly exposed.

“I chose this shop because they have a bit of everything,” Tan explains as he leads Will around. He starts at the front, and to Will’s surprise, they have a few things that are just his style. “They don’t shy away from your favourites,” Tan teases as he points at a few flannel patterns that peek out from the clothing racks, “and their general style is aligned to the outdoorsman look you prefer.”

Will arches his eyebrow. He’s sure there’s more to come.

“*And*,” Tan continues when he recognizes that Will isn’t going to probe him to continue, “they source their materials locally, are an independent company, and their clothing is of good quality while still falling easily within your budget.”

Will waits.

Tan gives in with a sigh. “I can’t hide anything from you,” he says, but he doesn’t look upset at all. He seems more fond than anything else. Will is pleased.

“*And*,” Tan says, “they make really good suits that are not to pretentious but very good quality and are *perfect* for events like, let’s say, presenting your research paper!”

“I knew it,” Will deadpans.

“Ahw,” Tan pouts, “please, Will. You just *have* to treat yourself with at least *one* suit. Just one.” He holds up a finger, close to his chest, and tries to pull off puppy eyes. Sadly, it’s very effective.

“I really think you’ll be surprised about how distinguished and attractive you’ll look, Will.”

Will hangs his head. Why the hell not. It’s not like he doesn’t have the money. And maybe some people would appreciate it on him. Maybe. Or they would criticize the cut. It’s fifty-fifty.

“Fine.”

“Yay!” Tan exclaims, drawing Will into a short but tight embrace. Heat floods Will’s body from where their bodies touch, an embarrassed kind of warmth filling him.

“I didn’t even have to bring out my trump card!” Tan semi-whispers to the camera as he walks away, drawing attention away from Will.

Will blinks, then steps forward, into the camera’s line of sight. “Is this related to your surprise?”

Tan grins. “That’s correct, detective,” he answers with a cheeky salute. Then he raises his voice. “You can come out now!”

There is an exited squeal in response. Will’s eyebrows are up to his hairline when he realizes it is coming from the changing rooms.

Beverly emerges with a grin.

“*Will!*” she gasps as soon as she sees him. “You look *amazing!*”

Will blinks at her, not computing. Beverly is here? Like… a friend?

“It’s not my fault,” he quips on autopilot, and Beverly laughs.

“Really, though,” she says, giving him a fierce hug. Will hugs her back for a moment before gently pushing her away. He’s proud of himself. That was almost normal behaviour.

“The haircut makes such a difference, and the *beard*! Oh, that’s amazing, Will. It looks great! And you also look like you’ve slept well for once, which probably makes the real difference.”

Will laughs. He’s always appreciated Beverly’s frankness.

“Are you here today to help Tan pressure me into a suit?”

“I’m not above guilt-tripping,” Beverly says.

Will cocks his head curiously. “What would you guilt-trip me with?”

Beverly smirks at him. “Oh, you know, telling Jack you’re working on professionalism. Telling Zeller that you’ve gotten a make-over,” Will makes a face, “which he’ll not let you live down for ages, and you know it.”

Beverly’s smirk turns into a sly smile. “And I could always call Alana and talk about how handsome you would look in a suit, and doesn’t she agree?”

Will blinks for a moment at her in confusion before getting the hint.

Strange. It’s been only two days since he’s figured out his not-attraction to Alana, but it feels like much longer.

Beverly picks up on his hesitation. She bends forward, lowering her voice. “Not Alana, huh? Or at least, not anymore.” Will looks away before shrugging, deliberately casual.

“Should I have called someone else, then?” Beverly asks, eyes keen. Will tries to keep his face schooled. This story really has lovely wallpaper.

“Maybe even a very specific someone else, who would certainly be an expert on tailored clothing, especially if it contained paisley?”

Will flinches. “What— how—”

Beverly practically beams at him. “I have eyes, Will,” she says. Then, a little louder, eyes flickering to the camera which is creeping closer, “good for you, dude, good for you.”

Will can’t help but ask. “Don’t you think it’s, well, you know?”

Beverly shrugs. “He’s a colleague, and your friend, right? So why not? I mean, it’s a far better choice than someone like Brian,” she shoots a sly look at the camera, “and I hope you hear that, Brian!”

Tan steps in, taking control. “Now that the reinforcements are here,” he says as he claps his hands together eagerly, “it’s time for our mission to start!”

Beverly cheers. Will resigns himself.

Three hours later, Will is the proud owner of six new well-fitting flannel shirts, five new sleek and comfortable pants, one new fly-fishing outfit, three sets of clothing suitable for teaching, a brown formal coat, and a very nice new leather jacket.

The last hurdle is the suit. Will tries to back out of it out of habit. Beverly and Tan spend at least fifteen minutes re-convincing him.

As Will comes out of the dressing room in his new fitted navy blue suit including dress-shirt, tie, and cufflinks, Beverly gasps.

Tan swoons theatrically, then turns into a big ball of adorable excitement.

And Will?

Will steps onto the platform with trepidation, hands clenched tightly as he turns around slowly towards the mirror, his jaw dropping open at the *man* standing in front of him at ease and handsome and elegant and he thinks—

Hannibal would like this.

Cooking for a Cutie

“Tomorrow is the big day.”

Will swallows and nods. “Yep.”

Antoni clasps him on the shoulder, squeezing. The camera behind them steps to the corner of Will’s kitchen, keeping both of them in view. “What’s the plan, my man?”

Will rolls his eyes but can’t stop his smile. “My presentation starts at 16:00. I’ll be at Quantico at 15:45. I’ll talk about my paper for an hour. After, there will be half an hour for questions, and another half an hour for mingling.”

Will rubs his arm. “I won’t be staying for the mingling, to give myself a break from the socializing.” It still comes out a little hesitant, but the underlying doubt disappears when Antoni gives him a thumbs-up. Will can hear Karamo in his head saying *your boundaries are your own, and no one can decide them for you*.

“I’ll go home and walk the dogs to clear my mind. My guests will arrive between 18:30 and 19:00. After that, I’ll prepare a few last-minute things for dinner as they mingle in the living room, and then I’ll bring out the food.”

Will has invited the usual suspects; Jack, Bella, Beverly, Alana, Zeller and Price. But he’s also asked Caroline and Ahmar, two of his fellow teachers he’s actually had a few pleasant conversations with in these past few years of teaching at FBI. He’s even invited Kala and Wolfgang from the dog shelter. The latter declined due to a prior commitment, but Kala has accepted.

And Hannibal.

“That’s right,” Antoni says cheerily. “Concerning dinner, there are a few tricks we will use. You don’t have a dining table for that amount of people, which is actually good,” he reassures Will, “not a hinderance. We’ll prepare several smaller dishes, put up two bistro standing tables, and let the guests eat as they talk. That way, the guests are able to switch conversational partners as they wish.”

Will nods, another worry sliding off his shoulders.

“Furthermore,” Antoni continues as he starts getting several utensils from Will’s newly-renovated kitchen, “while most of your dinner preparations will be done tomorrow during the day, a few things will still need to be prepared during the event. This is a good thing, because it’ll give you a few moments in the less-crowded kitchen.”

“I’ll probably need that,” Will remarks self-deprecatingly.

“Yes,” Antoni says, suddenly serious, turning towards him. “You probably will. And that’s not a bad thing, Will. It’s who you are and there is no shame in that. Your friends will

understand."

Will nods, chastised. No matter how often the Fab Five tell him these things, old habits die hard – as do familiar thought patterns.

But still, he's making steps. He actually believes Antoni, for example. Hannibal would be proud of him.

"Now I was thinking," Antoni says enthusiastically, "we *absolutely* have to use the fish you caught yourself. We are *not* going to let that opportunity go to waste, mister!"

"Sounds good!"

"Indeed," Antoni nods, pleased. "Other than that, we're going grocery shopping today. We'll buy everything twice – once for today, to practice, and once for tomorrow. Don't worry," Antoni adds, laughing at the look on Will's face, "it's really not that much work! I promise!"

"If you say so," Will says. His face betrays his scepticism.

"I do," Antoni says and claps his hands, jumping up and down in excitement. "Now let's go *shopping!*" The last part is half-sung. If there is one thing that makes every single member of the Fab Five break out in excitement, it's shopping. Will looks directly in the camera, deadpan, as if to say *what do you do*.

The camera guy snorts.

Soon, the three of them are sitting in the car on their way to the local market. "I've already brought several key ingredients in Baltimore yesterday, but I wanted your help with the last bits. For this, we'll just be going to Wolf Trap, so I can show you the hidden gems there!"

Will nods, but his gaze is distant.

"What's on your mind?" Antoni asks casually.

Will sighs. "I just hope my cooking is going to be up to everybody's standards," he says.

Antoni pats his arm. "Don't worry, Will. The key ingredients are all brought from specialty stores, ones even someone like, let's say," Antoni pretends to think it over, "Hannibal Lecter would frequent."

Will's eyes flicker to Antoni, then back out of the window.

"Other than that," Antoni says with a sly smile, "I have another proposition for you."

"What is it?"

"I would suggest employing a sous-chef tomorrow, because it is such a large group. Preferably someone who is experienced with cooking for larger groups of people and knows their way around a kitchen knife." The underlying implication shines through easily, a mischievous tilt to the words.

Will startles, turning to face Antoni head-on. “You want me to ask *Hannibal* to sous-chef?” he says incredulously.

“Absolutely!” Antoni exclaims, hands clasped in front of him. “Why not?”

“He’s not- that’s not-“ Will sputters, the image refusing to solidify in his mind. “That’s not how things are supposed to be!” *Hannibal* is the capable one, not Will.

“That’s what makes it so exiting,” Antoni says, nudging Will and wiggling his eyebrow. “Upset the status quo a bit! Who knows what it will bring,” he adds suggestively.

Will sank his head in his hands, unable to come up with a logical counter-argument.

“Besides,” Antoni is still far too cheerful, “this means you’ll get at least twenty minutes of one on one time in the kitchen. Win-win, right?”

Will groans.

“Let’s focus on surviving today, first.”

Antoni laughs loudly, clapping Will on the back.

The grocery shopping goes fine. Will is more lost than he liked to admit, but Antoni knows a lot and is not afraid to share it. At the checkout, the cashier flirts with him. That in itself was a rare occurrence, but the fact that Will actually managed to say something superficially charming back surprises him so much he ended up staring at his grocery bags for a full minute until Antoni tugs him along.

The rest of the day goes by smoothly; they make all four dishes, of which only one needs to be saved by Antoni. Will has enough frozen fresh fish in his freezer that he’s actually glad to be using some.

They all dine together. The rest of the Fab Five and the camera crew try out their cooking. Their noises of pleasure and enjoyment are genuine. Will sits between them, silent as he listens to the chatter around them, and feels at peace.

That night, he sleeps soundlessly. Tomorrow is the big day.

“It has been wonderful to get to know you, Will,” Tan says honestly as he draws Will into a hug.

“Group hug!” Jonathan yells and the other four pile upon Will and Tan, squeezing and laughing. Will is laughing as well, surprised at his own ease.

They pull back and then each give him another hug as well, arms warm and steady around him. Will thanks all of them for their advice, their support, their kindness.

“Really, guys,” Will says as the Fab Five stand before their car, ready to take off. Only two cameraman stay with him today. “You really are magical. If someone told me a week ago that

my life right now would be like this," he starts, then breaks off. Will's throat closes up. He feels tears forming in his eyes – caused by happiness, instead of grief.

Will almost can't believe it himself.

"Really. Thank you," he manages, meeting each of the Fab Five's gazes one by one. Their emotions wash over them, but for once Will is not afraid – he doesn't have to be, as *careaffectiongratitudehappinesshopefullness* spills through each of their eyes into his mind.

"Thank *you* for allowing us in," Karamo says with a soft expression. Bobby clasps his arm around Karamo's shoulders and nods in agreement. "You're an amazing guy, Will," Bobby says. "Your doctor is lucky I'm taken," he adds with a wink.

Will shakes his head with a fond smile, unable to stop his blush.

"I hope you keep treating yourself like you did this week, Will," Tan says more seriously. "You deserve it." Antoni nods next to him, popping his chin on Tan's shoulder. "Hell yeah, you do. You are amazing, Will, and I hope you see that too, now."

"I'm starting to," Will says honestly. It is true.

Jonathan bounces forward for the last time, wrapping his arms around Will again and kissing him noisily on the cheek. "My little Will, all grown up," he says as he wipes away an imaginary tear. "So proud!"

Then he retreats, and with him the other four. They raise their hands – or blow a kiss in the case of Jonathan – and disappear into the car.

Will watches them go, a little sad. The warm feeling in his chest diminishes ever-so-slightly.

But then Buster and Zoe rub their heads to his knees, and Will looks back at his beautiful house, thinks of his wonderful colleagues, the look on Hannibal's face as Will leaned back against the ladder in his office the last session.

The warmth blossoms anew. Will goes back into the house with a smile.

That morning, Will showers using his new products. Shaves, removing the little stubble that had emerged. Goes into the kitchen to prepare what he can, muttering Antoni's instructions from yesterday word-by-word as he does so.

He lets the dogs out. Goes back inside and pulls out his suit, laid it on the bed.

(*Miles away, back in their chic apartment, the Fab Five cuddle together on the couch.)*

After a moment of deliberation and Tan's elaborate explanation of tie knots in the back of his mind, Will finally makes up his mind.

Piece by piece, the suit comes together. It's not a three-piece, nor does it have a pocket square; however, his shoes and new watch pull the look together.

And last but not least, the tie. It takes Will ten minutes of googling and ten more minutes of trying the knot, but he eventually ends up with a perfect Trinity knot.

The perfect way to stand out without standing out too much, Tan had explained to him. *It symbolizes balance of body, spirit, and mind.*

They always say to dress for the job you want, not the one you have. Will figures the same applies to this.

To top it off, Will combes his hair back like Jonathan had shown him.

(*Look, guys, he used the hair gel! Will, baby, I'm so proud! – Never mind that, Jonathan, look at his tie! He's using the trinity! – It's not a yelling competition, guys, oh my God.)*

Will takes a deep breath and faces the mirror.

He's ready.

Will arrives early. The lecture hall is empty save one person when he walks in. He's wearing a suit.

The person turns around, and for a moment Will's gut clenches with illogical disappointment when he sees it is Ahmar.

Ahmar stands there, coffee in hand, and greets Will with a nod. A fellow introvert, Will and Ahmar get along fabulously, sitting next to each other in peaceful silence during their lunch breaks. They have formed something that is not quite a friendship yet but more than a positive association through snorts, eye-rolls and sighs whenever a staff meeting takes place.

"Hi, Will."

"Hi, Ahmar. Thanks for being here."

"You look good," Ahmar says, nervously adjusting his glasses. "How've you been?"

Will shrugs. "Fine. Ready to get this over with, honestly," he says as he starts powering up his laptop and unpacking his bag.

"I'm exited," Ahmar says quietly but earnestly. As a fellow forensics professor, though specialized in the chemical part of forensics rather than the psychological part, Ahmar and Will had enough in common they understand each others' works easily. "Your abstract was really interesting, especially the part about predicting violent behaviour based on parent-teacher meeting behaviours."

"Thank you," Will says with a smile before being interrupted by a gasp.

Ahmar and Will turn their heads simultaneously. Caroline stands in the door opening, her long ginger hair loose from her usual braid, dressed in a professional outfit very unlike her

usual baggy clothes. “Will! You look amazing! I heard some rumours about you hiring a personal stylist?”

Will doesn’t need to look to his left to know Ahmar has just raised one very confused eyebrow. “Eh,” he starts, scratching his head and trying to explain as Caroline comes closer, giving him a short hug he endures with a grimace, “actually…”

Before Will can explain, the doors to the auditorium open once more. Bahija and Isaac enter, both with a camera on their shoulder.

“Hi, Will,” they greet him before inspecting the room and whispering about camera angles and audio quality.

“Uh,” Will says to his two colleague’s incredulous stares.

It takes a good ten minutes to explain the situation to them both. They are happy for him, each in their own way, and express their thanks for inviting him to the dinner afterwards.

(*Oh, oh, the camera is working. Look! Will’s already socialising! I’m so proud!)*

People slowly start to tickle in. It’s mostly students, but there are a few colleagues from Quantico and elsewhere both. It seems like his professional fame from the death by insect activity paper had not yet faded – or they have come to see him for another reason. To see that crazy guy from the news, that guy that caught the Minnesota Shrike. The headline flashes before his minds eye, *takes one to know one*.

Will feels a sliver of doubt creeping in, a voice in his head saying *they’re only here to stare at you, laugh at you, study you* – but he quickly dismisses it. Karamo’s voice echoes in his head, far louder than any of the other voices; *you’re a great guy, Will. People listen to you because you are worth listening to*.

Will squares his shoulders. Waves at the camera.

(*He’s waving! Look! Hi, Will, Hiii! – He can’t actually hear you, Bobby.)*

Will busies himself with arranging and re-arranging his notes as his colleagues take their seats and more and more people fill the empty seats. The ambience of the hall slowly rises from silence to soft chatter. Will fiddles with his cufflinks and barely stops himself from ruining his carefully put together tie. It’s almost time to start. Will takes a last sip and leans against his desk, keeping his eyes on his hands.

The doors open once more.

Will looks up just in time to see Hannibal Lecter falter.

For a moment, it feels as if they are the only people in the room. Will barely sees the rest of his colleagues enter; the only reason he takes note of them is because Beverly bumps into Hannibal. Then the reason why registers; Hannibal has frozen in the middle of the pathway, eyes on Will.

The doctor's face is aggressively blank. It's like looking at a computer error on a human, *four-zero-four not found*, if such a thing would exist. Will would have been offended if not for the way Hannibal's eyes darken. Hannibal is blank-faced not because he feels nothing, but because he feels too much.

Heat rises to Will's cheeks.

Movement and sound return to the world, seeming to run faster as if to catch up to their moment of stillness. Beverly, Zeller and Price are up in his face chattering excitedly and gesturing at his hair, his clothes, his face. Beverly is looking smug; both Zeller and Price are disbelieving. Jack and Bella stand behind them, a fond expression on Jack's face, a genuine smile on Bella's.

"Guys," Will interrupts the trio. "The talk is going to start soon."

"He's right, boys!" Beverly exclaims with a grin. "Shoo!" she says as she winks at Will, then at one of the camera's.

(*I really like Beverly, you know that? – Yes, Tan, you said so. Thrice.*)

Will turns back with a flutter of nerves in his stomach. He's mildly surprised when he turns and it's Alana standing in front of him, not Hannibal, a glint in her eyes he's not sure what to do with.

"You look amazing, Will," she compliments him.

Will rubs his arm. "Thank you," he says.

Alana bites her lip and tucks her hair behind her ear. "I'm looking forward to the dinner tonight," she says, before leaving to take her seat.

Will nods at her distractedly before finally facing the man he has been waiting for.

(*Ugh, he's so handsome… – Which of them are you talking about, Jonathan? – Both, duh!)*

"Hannibal," Will says before he can stop himself. He swallows, ducking his head. The old Will never called him anything other than Dr. Lecter.

"*Will*," Hannibal responds, voice thick with emotion. Will blinks twice, chances a look upwards to read the other man's face, and finds nothing there but a complete, laser-like focus on him. On Will. A shiver runs down his spine, and Will's hand twitches. Being the focus of Hannibal's attention is… disarming.

A butterfly pinned upon the board, but instead of cold and distant, its soothing. Hannibal's eyes pin him in place not to study, but to cherish. To take in every single atom that together forms into Will Graham, so that he might remember them later with crystal-clear quality.

Will's heart speeds up.

“You look very handsome tonight,” Hannibal says, an undercurrent in his voice that betrays the fact he wants to say something much more than that. Will smiles softly, surprised at how much easier it is to read the older man now that he’s gotten his own head on straight.

Less inner demons to disarm your own positive thoughts about yourself turns out to actually be really helpful.

“Thank you,” he says simply, accepting the compliment like Jonathan taught him. Though Will can’t stop the blush rising to his cheeks, he tries to cover it up by fiddling with his glasses. “I still feel underdressed next to you.”

Hannibal chuckles, bringing a hand up to adjust Will’s collar, then trailing that hand across his upper arm. It’s almost possessive. “You should never,” he says gently.

(*Did you see that? Did you* see *that?!*)

Will bites his lip and barely stops himself from touching his glasses again. He is *not* going to act like a teenage girl with a crush, thank you very much.

“I’m going to begin soon,” he manages, strangely tongue-tied.

“Good luck,” Hannibal wishes him, lingering a moment too long before stepping away and disappearing into the front row, directly in view of the camera that’s filming the audience.

Will breathes in, out, and gathers himself. He dims the lights.

“Good afternoon to you all,” he starts, all too aware of the eyes resting on him. One pair of eyes in particular.

For the entirety of the presentation and discussion, Hannibal’s gaze never leaves Will.

Will breathes in relief as he kneels down to greet his dogs.

He has exactly thirty-four minutes before the first guests will arrive. His presentation had gone well. He’d even had an interesting discussion with Caroline and – surprisingly – Bella afterwards. Most of his student’s questions had actually been well-thought out.

He hadn’t spoken to Hannibal again. First, he spent fifteen minutes in another discussion about his second hypothesis – *which had perfect internal validity, thank you very much, Dr. Steinfield* – before he had managed to extract himself from his fellow forensic psychologists. Then he’d chatted with Jack and Alana for just a few minutes before excusing himself, citing the need for dinner preparations.

He had been alone except for Bahija and her camera, but they had an understanding. Will had spent a wonderful twenty minutes cuddling his dogs, then let them outside to burn off any excess energy and started checking his house over once more.

(*Look how much more at ease he is, now that his house is in order. And he took a moment for himself, good job, Will! – You’re just proud of your own design, Bobby. But you’re right. –*

Hell yeah I am, Karamo, as I should be!)

Just before 18:30, Will uses his newly acquired lint remover to get rid of stray hairs, straightens his suit, and takes a last grounding breath.

He checks his phone to see a message from Hannibal. His heart flutters in his throat before he mentally shakes himself and opens it. *We are on our way*, it says, time-stamped at 17:26. They would be here any moment. Will appreciates the forewarning, like he appreciates most of Hannibal's courtesies. The man never forgets anything.

Will closes his phone at the exact same moment the Bentley rolls up on his driveway.

(*Is that- he drives a BENTLEY? Why has nobody told me that? Can this man literally get any more perfect?*)

Hannibal rises smoothly from the drivers seat, the camera following Will outside as he opens his door. He stands on the porch, smiling, as Hannibal dusts himself off and meets him on the porch.

"Hey," Will says, smiling shyly.

"Good evening again, to you both," Hannibal says, nodding to both Will and Bahija. Bahija waves from behind the camera. Hannibal's eyes flash, and Will knows that whatever happens tonight, Hannibal will never forget the camera's presence. Something to keep in mind.

"Are you ready for tonight?" Hannibal asks politely.

"As much as I can be," Will says. Takes a breath. "Actually," he starts, adjusting his glasses to make sure the rim did *not* obstruct his line of sight, "I wanted to ask you something."

Hannibal straightens almost impalpably. "Oh?"

"Would you do me the favour of being my sous-chef tonight?"

It's almost flirty. Will is glad for his decision to meet Hannibal's gaze. This way, he can see the surprise emerging from their great maroon depths, the amusement that follows, succeeded by something that's close to wonder.

Hannibal inclines his head and drops into a half-bow with a flourish of his hand. "I would be honoured," he says. Though his body language is teasing, his words are absolutely serious.

Will's teeth scrape his bottom lip. Hannibal's eyes flash.

Their moment is interrupted by the sound of several other cars pulling up on Will's driveway. Will startles, remembering the outside world exists, as well as the concept of time. "Please, come in," he manages awkwardly, hoping Hannibal isn't too offended by being made to stand out in the cold for so long.

Hannibal enters Will's house with a raised eyebrow, looking around him in wonder. "It seems like a lot has changed in just one week," he remarks. "I must take care to prevent myself from

not contacting you for so long again, or else I might not be able to recognize you at all," he teases.

Will wills away a blush. "Don't worry," he reassures Hannibal, leaning forward so their shoulders brush, "I may have a new layer of paint, but I'm still the same old broken tea cup underneath," he jokes.

He turns to move outside, but Hannibal stops him with nothing but a light touch on his shoulder.

Will turns his head and looks straight into Hannibal's intense gaze.

"You are more precious than even the rarest of my fine china," Hannibal says lowly, soft enough that the camera tries to inch closer. "And I will not have you speak so lowly of yourself, Will, especially when it is so far from the truth."

Will stares back and believes him. He can see the absolute conviction of the truth of his words in Hannibal's eyes. How he holds Will so far above the others they might not even exist; mere ants in the garden of Adam and Eve.

Will blinks. Looks to his feet. Hannibal's hand falls away. Will turns to the door.

(*No! Ah, do you see the look on poor Dr. Lecter's face-)*

"Thank you, Hannibal," Will says as he steps outside.

(*-oh, that's better. Do I spot a smile there? – Oh, Antoni, these boys play with my heart!)*

Caroline and Ahmed are at the door, Kara walking shyly behind them. In the background, the BAU team exit their cars, already talking loudly.

"Good to see you," Will greets them, turning to Kara specifically. "I'm glad you came. Welcome to my home."

The three introduce themselves, and Will leads them inside. Jack and the others follow soon after. Those of them who have seen his house before this – which comes down to Jack, Alana and Beverly – are amazed at the change. They urge him to give a tour, which Will eventually gives in to, glad he hasn't unpacked that much so everything is still tidy and as impersonal as possible.

All his guests are appropriately awed at his new home. Beverly takes great joy in describing the former state of the house and complimenting its improvements.

(*You were right, Tan, Beverly really is amazing. – Oh, shut up, Bobby.)*

Will is glad to let Beverly and Caroline do most of the talking, only speaking when spoken to. During the entire tour Hannibal never seems to be far from him. It's subtle, so subtle Will thinks at first he's imagining it. But he's not. Even though the doctor's eyes take in every detail of Will's home like he's starved for it, even though Hannibal is polite and attentive and

all-around charming, whenever they move to a new room Hannibal manages to end up within touching distance of Will.

This mostly means Will spends the entire time conscious of the doctor's every move.

He tries his best not to blush when he shows them his bedroom and sees Hannibal's eyes linger on the bed.

After a good twenty minutes, the tour is finally done. They ascend downstairs.

(*Was I just imagining that, or did Dr. Sexy totally check Will's ass out back there? – That's just wistful thinking, Jonathan.)*

Will sneaks into the kitchen and reaches into the refrigerator to take out the devilled eggs, a simple but effective appetizer.

He sets two plates on both of the standing tables. "Something to get you started," he says as his guests start to dig in, Price and Zeller immediately taking one in each hand and thanking him earnestly as their stomachs rumble at the exact same time.

"I'll start on the rest of the food. In the meantime, the beer and wine is outside, so it's still cold, and the glasses and other beverages are over there," he says as he first points to the side of the porch and then to the table in the corner of the living room. This way, Bobby had explained, Will only needs to concern himself with the food, not the drinks. It also make the whole thing a bit more casual, which is what Will wants.

"Open bar?" Caroline asks excitedly, clapping her hands together.

"Atta, girl!" Beverly exclaims. "You're my kind of chick!"

"Have at it," Will says encouragingly as he sweeps his arms wide. The two women immediately move outside, a single camera following them.

"Do you need some help in the kitchen, Will?" Alana asks, stepping forward.

Will scratches his neck. "Thanks for he offer," he says, looking at Alana's shoulder, "but, uh, I actually already asked Hannibal to sous-chef."

Alana's eyebrows rise, then settle as she chuckles. "Yeah," she says, "that's a smart move. Be careful he doesn't take over!" she warns him playfully, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

"I would not dare," Hannibal says, suddenly at Will's side, just a bit too close to be casual.

Will rolls his eyes. "We'll see about that," he mutters and turns to the kitchen, Hannibal obediently following behind.

But it turns out Will hadn't need to worry. Hannibal is attentive, friendly, and seriously helpful. He dices and slices whatever Will gives him within moments, giving Will time to mentally review his to-do list and check the oven settings.

“I hope this works out,” Will mutters to himself as he puts the first course, stuffed artichokes, into the oven.

“It looks wonderful,” Hannibal says. He doesn’t seem to notice that the camera is aimed on him, but Will notices his smile is more artificial than usual.

“You’re just saying that to be nice.”

“Not at all. Your ingredients seem to be high quality and carefully chosen, which is half of what makes a meal. You’ve taken the time to double-check everything, which is another big part.”

“And, of course, the parts are perfectly sliced and diced,” Will added teasingly.

Hannibal chuckled. “That does improve the consistency of the meal, I admit. And am I correct in deducing that you’ve made this before?”

“Yeah,” Will admitted, turning back from the oven. “Bobby took me through it. Helped choose the ingredients, as well.”

“A wonderful mentor, if he’s managed to take such steps with you in such short time.”

(*Wait. Is he- is he actually jealous?)*

Will presses his lips together and adjusts his glasses. Looks at Hannibal’s shoulder. “Maybe you can help me, next time,” he suggests. Hopes it doesn’t sound as awkward as it feels.

“I would like that very much,” Hannibal says seriously. Will doesn’t look up, but he knows the doctor is staring.

(*Ahhhh, Karamo, you were right! Ah! – You literally can’t stop screaming, can’t you, Jonathan?)*

“Great,” Will says and turns to the fridge. “Let’s prepare our main course as well while we’re at it,” he says and hands Hannibal the brightly-coloured vegetables.

This preparation goes smoothly once more – the camera even leaves them alone for a few moments, though it returns not too long after. Will tries to think of something to say or do in those moments of privacy, but flounders.

Instead Hannibal asks about his paper presentation, and he and Will have a surprisingly intense but pleasant discussion about it. Will is surprised to notice he’s really enjoying himself. Unlike the questions from his fellow colleagues, which make him feel like he’s defending himself from a pack of vultures, or the questions from his students, which just make him feel like a teacher, Hannibal’s questions challenge him. He’s sharp and critical, but not aggressive or condescending. He lets Will speak, not butting in as soon as he can, and adjust his arguments or reasoning to Will’s explanations. He offers insights from his own fields, but also proves knowledgeable on many other subjects.

Will knows Hannibal is intelligent and well-read, but to experience it like this-

It's weirdly attractive.

Will is very glad he's had the car-conversation with Karamo.

"Thanks for the help, Hannibal," Will says. The doctor's given name still feels new and exiting, rolling of his rongue. Everything is done – the artichoke is ready to be served. The main course only needs to be fried, which Will can manage alone. They've been in the kitchen for less then twenty minutes, but Will feels revitalized.

"Are you ready to face the vultures yet, or do you want me to pretend to prepare something else?" Hannibal asks him with a smile.

(*Ahww, he's so sweet! – Men like him always are, secretly. – Yeah, the good ones!*)

"I'm good," Will returns the smile, "but thank you for offering."

Will is about to pick up the first course when a barrage of paws echoes from the living room, slowly moving to the kitchen.

"Oh, right," Will says. "They must be able to smell the food."

His dogs enter the kitchen a moment later. Buster leads the horde and the other six follow soon after, enticed by the smell. Bahjia has to step to the side, her camera wobbling on her shoulder, lest the dogs run her over.

"Not now, guys," Will admonishes his dogs. "You'll get your dinner after – *outside*."

"You won't mind if I give them a little treat, do you?" Hannibal asks him, already reaching into his inner pocket.

"Huh?" Will asks dumbly. Remembers how Hannibal always gives his dogs treats. Did the man seriously bring the treats in that expensive suit of his to his dinner party? Doesn't that ruin the lining of his suit or something?

All seven of his dogs recognize Hannibal and sit obediently in front of him. It's almost comical, like a teacher lecturing his students, as Hannibal feeds them a piece of bacon one by one with personalized instructions to each of the dogs to behave.

They all wag their tails happily.

"I think they like you better than me," Will grumbles good-naturedly.

"Ah, but mine is a temporary love," Hannibal says as he pets Zoë and straighteners, "whereas they are loyal to you, always." He shoots Will a look before reaching down to feed Harley.

"It seems you are not the only one who has a way with dogs, Will," a new voice emerges from the doorway. Kara is standing there with a smile, watching Hannibal feed the dogs.

"I am not much of a dog person," Hannibal admits to her without taking his eyes of Harley, the last of the dogs to be fed. "But Will's dogs are an exception. They are well-trained and

polite, which are two things everyone should aspire to be." A playful smile curls around Hannibal's words.

Kara laughs, nodding in agreement. "Well said, Dr. Lecter, well said. You heard it, Will. You'll have to behave."

Will blushes. He starts to correct her assumption, but Hannibal is faster.

"Will is never on anything but his best behaviour," the older man replies, eyes shining. "Now," he continues as he leads Kara back into the living room, the camera following them both, "you mentioned you studied chemistry?"

(*Are they actually managing to flirt? I'm impressed. Oh, wait, he's gone. – I don't think Dr. Lecter likes the camera much, Antoni.*)

Will watches them go. Blinks.

Decides to start serving the first course.

He's received with cheers as he hands out the food. Bella compliments him on his talk and on his food, roping him into a conversation about different cultural eating habits that Ahmed joins. It's easy conversation as they eat, a lovely (non-violent) topic for once.

Will looks around. Jack is telling an animated story to Caroline and Alana, which looks to be something involving fish. Hannibal and Kara are listening attentively to Price, who is explaining something that involves both calculations and molecular structure. They both actually look like they're following what he's saying. Beverly and Zeller are sitting on the couch, heads together and gossiping.

Will realizes this… *thing* is actually going *well*.

Huh.

(*Look at that, guys. I'm so proud. – Me, too.*)

He tunes back in to Ahmed and Bella, who have moved on to talk about Bella's recent trip to Italy. He listens for a moment before he's drawn aside by Beverly and Zeller, who have made their way over from the couch.

To interrogate him about his shopping trip(s).

Will acquires with grace. Ish.

"And then," Beverly says animatedly, "when the moment was there, Tan and I had to convince Will all over again to actually *put on the suit*."

Will shrugs. "Suits are not my thing. This one is surprisingly comfortable, yes, but it's probably going to disappear in the back of my closet until the next FBI gala."

“That would be a shame,” a new voice cuts in. Hannibal slides in smoothly between Beverly and Will, and Will doesn’t miss the sly smile on Beverly’s face. “There are no occasions that won’t be improved by a well-made suit,” Hannibal states decisively.

“Fly-fishing,” Will deadpans.

“There are almost no occasions that won’t be improved by a well-made suit,” Hannibal states just as decisively. The others laugh.

“Well, it just so happens I want to be prepared to go fly-fishing at any given moment,” Will says jokingly, “so no suits for me.”

Beverly pouts, though Zeller nods in overt agreement. Hannibal shrugs elegantly. “You have not yet tried a truly bespoke suit,” he argues, “so I would advise you to, ah, hold that thought.”

“We’ll see about that,” Will replies, arching an eyebrow at the superior tilt of Hannibal’s head. “Now if you’ll all excuse me,” he says with the same kind of extravagant bow that Hannibal had made at he beginning of the evening, “I must now take my leave to serve you the main course.”

“Travel far and travel safe,” Beverly says with a posh accent, “but never forget to travel home.”

Will waves a hand at her and walks into the kitchen. He busies himself with frying the vegetables quickly and putting them on each plate, covering them up with foil to preserve the heat. He is just taking the fish out of the fridge when he hears someone come up behind him.

“Really, Hannibal, go enjoy the party,” he says as he grabs the fish. “I’m sure our guests can survive less than perfectly sliced fish,” he continues, enjoying the fluttering of his nerves as he dares to call his guests *theirs*.

When there is no immediate answer, Will turns around. It’s not Hannibal. It’s Alana.

“Oh. Sorry,” he apologizes, setting the fish on the counter.

Alana smiles. “It’s okay,” she says. “You’re a really good cook,” tucking her hair behind her ear, “I didn’t know that about you.”

Will smiles back, eyes flickering to her hands, the tilt of her head. An uneasy feeling flickers in the back of his mind.

(*Oh, guys, look! It’s Alana! – She’s going to ask him out, I just know it. I hope he says no. – Jonathan! – What? I’m team Hot Doctor all the way!*)

“I learned a lot from the Fab Five this past week,” Will says fondly. “About myself, about my habits, and about cooking as well, clearly,” he jokes, gesturing at the plates around him.

“It’s amazing,” Alana agrees and *oh*, she’s suddenly standing really close. She smells like freshly cut flowers. “Maybe we could cook together again, sometime,” she suggests shyly,

twirling her hair around her finger. “Just the two of us.”

“Ehm,” Will says smoothly. “I don’t know. Maybe. But, uh,” okay, he can do this, just be clear about his feelings, but polite. “We could do that,” he tries again, “as friends.” Well, that went splendidly.

Alana straightens from where she had been turning her body towards him, frowning in confusion. “Oh. Uh. I thought you – oh. Never mind.”

Will debates explaining the whole mirroring-thing and his inner speculation on their future, but reminds himself that is probably not helpful. It will probably only manage to make things words. Besides, no means no, whether in a romantic or professional context.

Your boundaries are your own, and no one can decide them for you.

“Sorry,” Will mumbles awkwardly.

“It’s alright,” Alana says, quickly backing off. “I’m going to get a drink, okay?”

“Yeah,” he says, quickly turning his attention back to the fish.

(*Well, that was… something. – Never mind that, Tan. Did you see the other camera? – What? – Dr. Lecter was totally standing in earshot for that conversation! – What?!*)

Frying fish is as natural to Will as breathing, and soon the main course was done. It takes a few trips to serve everyone their plate, but soon everyone has their meal in front of them, politely waiting. Will realizes they are all looking at him.

“You have to say something,” Kara whispers from next to him. Will shoots a panicked look at Hannibal, who is standing on his other side, just a little too close to be proprietary, but the older man just smiles.

Will sighs. He can’t stand up, as they’re all already standing, so he just raises his glass.

“Thank you all for coming,” he says, and toasts. “Dig in.”

“Hell yeah!” Beverly and Caroline shout simultaneously from the other side of the room, both their cheeks a bit rosy. They heft their wine glasses high. Will is glad fish pairs well with white whine, not red. “To Will!”

“To Will!” everyone choruses obediently but cheerfully. Will thinks he imagines the tilt to Hannibal’s voice as he says this along with the others, but he isn’t sure.

There is silence for a few moments as people dig in. Slowly, the chatter starts up again, intermixed with compliments shouted Will’s way.

“It really is good,” Kara tells him. “You can taste that you’ve caught it fresh.”

“Will is a wonderful fisherman,” Hannibal says proudly. Will hides behind his glass of alcohol-free cider, determined to not ruin this night with his alcoholism.

“How long have you two been together?” Kara asks.

Will chokes on his cider. He manages to ruin drinking fluid so badly that it even spills on his clothes.

“Careful,” Hannibal admonishes him, quickly wiping out his handkerchief and leaning forward to dab at the liquid.

“Shit,” Will curses, setting the cider down and looking at his clothes. His first reaction is relief; it doesn’t look like it spilled too badly, and Hannibal’s quick thinking prevented it from ruining his shirt. There is really only one noticeable stain. That’s the good news.

The bad news is that the stain is on his tie, and very noticeable.

Will sighs. Well, there goes the whole trinity knot polished look thing. He starts to discard the tie, before a thought occurs to him.

This can be an opportunity.

“My tie is ruined,” Will sighs, looking forlorn. “I literally spent half an hour on this knot,” he tells Kara in a staged whisper. She giggles. “I do have a spare tie, but I don’t think I can manage the knot again.”

“You could just discard it,” Kara suggests.

“Or,” Hannibal cuts in authoritatively, “I could help you. I’m familiar with the Trinity. It will be no effort for me to assist.”

Will does his absolute best to hide his delight. “I don’t want to be a burden,” he says, knowing it will only spur Hannibal on.

“Nonsense,” the doctor decides, already taking Will by the arm. “We’ll be back in a moment,” he says to Kara.

(*They’re moving upstairs!*)

Will ascends the stairs first, praying to any god he knows the camera will leave them alone.

He doesn’t see the look Hannibal throws Bahija as she starts to follow them.

(*Damn. There’s a stern doctor, yes* sir*! – I actually think it’s good for those two to have a bit of privacy. Their relationship has progressed so much in just a few hours. Not everything is meant for the cameras. – But Karamo, think about the drama!*)

Will turns left into his bedroom. Hannibal closes the door behind them. His earlier confidence disappears like smoke. His heart is beating faster, his stomach fluttering. “I think I have it here somewhere,” Will says as he opens his closet and browses his ties.

“Let me help,” Hannibal says, stepping up behind him. Will can feel the older man’s body heat, a sea of warmth against his back. Hannibal leans forward, hands on either side of Will’s

body as he picks out a burgundy tie.

“This will offset the blue in your suit wonderfully,” Hannibal murmurs lowly as his long and slim fingers stroke the cloth of the tie. Will’s eyes follow the movement.

Will takes a steadying breath. “No paisley?” he jokes, back still turned towards Hannibal’s front.

He can feel Hannibal’s breath teasing along his nape as he chuckles. “I don’t think it would quite suit you,” the doctor says as he moves backward. Will doesn’t have any time to be disappointed when a hand gently but firmly lands on his shoulder and tugs. Will follows obediently, turning to face Hannibal, who still has the tie.

Hannibal is standing really close.

“Thank you,” Will says as he takes the tie and loops it around his neck in a hurry, fumbling. His earlier practice is forgotten with the other man standing so close. Will can smell him now, a heady scent that envelops him like it never wants to let him go, the floral and harmless aftershave trying to cover up the hints of steel and wildfire beneath them. A wolf in sheep’s clothing. A man, hiding the monster.

Will shivers in anticipation.

He’s so distracted that it takes a few seconds before Will realizes he doesn’t know what the hell he’s doing with his tie. “Ugh,” he says, “this is not how it should be.”

Hannibal lays his hands upon Will’s, a gentle touch that makes Will go still.

“Let me help you,” Hannibal says.

Will watches Hannibal work as if in a dream. Hannibal lays the cloth around his neck, running a finger along the cloth to make sure it isn’t twisted. He trails a finger along Will’s nape, leaving a trail of fire and heat behind.

Hannibal grabs each end of the tie and starts slowly and gently tying the Trinity knot. His eyes are on his hands, on Will’s neck. Will cannot look away from Hannibal’s face, his focused expression, free to study the other man’s features. The long eyelashes, the sharp cheekbones, the thin lips. Will feels himself start to blush, unable to will it away this time.

Hannibal doesn’t seem to be in a hurry, ghosting his hands along Will’s neck and chest whenever he can. Will’s pretty sure his whole body is alight with sensation. If not for the past week of gentle touches from the Fab Five, he’s not sure he could’ve handled the amount of touching, even through the cloth.

As it is, Will just feels anticipation and arousal coil low in his gut.

Hannibal’s hands still, but do not leave the cloth. Will takes a shuddering breath before managing to talk.

“Thank you.”

Hannibal's eyes rise to meet his. Will does not look away, does not even try to hide whatever he's feeling right now.

Hannibal's hands trail along the tie, first downwards, then upwards.

Then he rises further, touching Will's neck, then his chin.

Will inhales sharply.

And then Hannibal takes his head in both hands and brings their faces closer together.

Stills.

Will licks his lips.

That seems to be the sign Hannibal is waiting for. He's Will immediately, lips crushing into his with surprising force. With passion. Will moans at the feeling, the sensation of skin against skin. He manages to get his arms around Hannibal and hauls him closer, pushing their bodies together from head to toe. Hannibal groans lowly and gets one hand around Will's back. Will moves his hand to clutch at Hannibal's hair. It's soft and smooth and he never wants to let go.

Will gasps for air and Hannibal takes the opportunity to slip his tongue inside Will's mouth. Will opens to him easily, feeling like he's being conquered, claimed. He moans and Hannibal pushes forward, caging Will against the wall. Will feels safe, guarded from the rest of the world. Whomever or whatever is out there, there is nothing that could defeat Hannibal. Somehow, Will is completely certain.

Hannibal moves back, panting. Will blinks at the sight before him, Hannibal's slightly tinted cheeks and wet, shining lips. The older man starts to say something but Will doesn't give him the chance, surging upward for another kiss.

They stay like that for god knows how long, hands roaming each other's bodies, lips meeting again and again. Will feels like he's floating, like he's complete. Every sound Hannibal makes, every groan and whispered *Will* is met by Will's own moans and whines, unable to stop now that he's finally begun.

Eventually, they break apart. Will's panting, glasses askew and hair ruined, and Hannibal is looking no better.

"Will," Hannibal says, and his voice is tight.

Nervous.

Will feels touched.

"Hannibal," Will says fondly, running his hands along the doctor's jaw. He smiles. "I never thought your manners would be anything but impeccable, but here you are, stealing the host away from his own party," he teases. "What must our guests think?"

Hannibal laughs lowly, the tension in his shoulders melting away. He leans closer, brushing his nose against Will's jaw, inhaling deeply. "I must confess I have little care for them," he murmurs, "when I have you, here, in my arms."

Will's heart flutters. "I'm already thinking of sneaking out of my own party," he says, "don't make it harder on me, now."

Hannibal grins wolfishly. It makes him look younger, more dangerous. It's unfairly hot.

"Don't tempt me," Hannibal says and kisses him again.

Will gladly kisses back.

To hell with the party, anyway.

Art inspiration

The kissing scene was inspired by this wonderful art made by Rebelflet! Go check it out!

End Notes

none of Hannibal's plans can hold up against the power of the Fab Five I'm sorry but it's true

Hope you liked it <3 Kudos and comments are love!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!